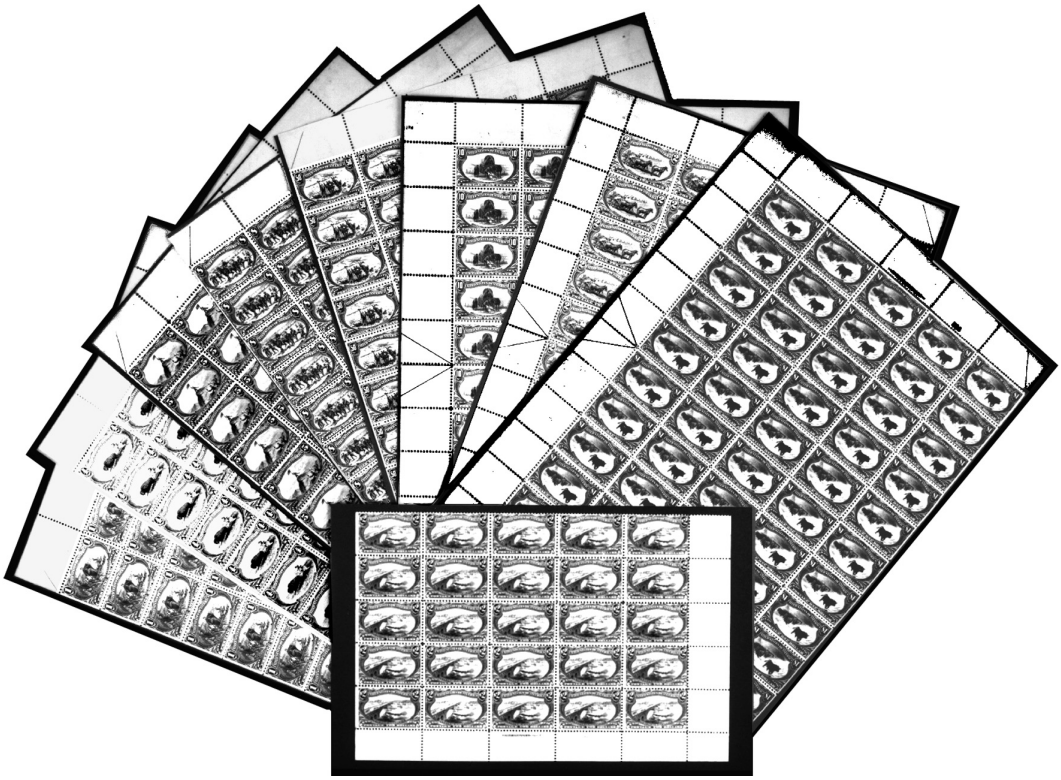
The Trans-Mississippi Issue Scott 285-293



The Trans-Mississippi Issue, or Omahas, may be overshadowed in popular philatelic lore by the Columbian set, but it is nevertheless one of the most highly regarded and closely studied commemorative sets in all of United States philately.

Modern philatelists are particularly indebted to the research and writings of our predecessors. Most noteworthy among these is George B. Sloane, whose studies of the Trans-Mississippis appeared at various times in STAMPS and was brought together in The Stamp Specialist, Volume 9. Another important reference source is the specialized study that appeared in the U.S. Specialist of the Bureau Issues Association in the 1970s.

In preparing this summary Reference Manual series we have called upon the material above as well as the writings of other philatelists, including the more recent work of Randy Neil with Jack Rosenthal. And, of course, we are indebted to the staff of the American Philatelic Research Library for assisting us in pulling together much of the original material.

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As America's interests began to shift towards the West in the final years of the 19th century, a movement sprung up in the Midwest to stage an international exposition from June 1 to November 1, 1898, in Omaha, Nebraska, to further the progress and develop the resources of the region west of the Mississippi River. The official name of this planned event was the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition. Given the length of its name, even when shortened to Trans-Mississippis, the contemporary name of the stamp set quickly caught on with collectors as the "Omahas". As time passed and collectors identified more with the subject matter of the stamps and less with the site of the Exposition, we have reverted back to the "Trans-Mississippis," or "Trans-Miss." issues.

The idea for a postage stamp set commemorating the Exposition is credited to Edward Rosewater, the well-connected activist publisher of the *Omaha Daily Bee*. Rosewater, who was Chairman of the Committee on Publicity proposed the set to the Post Office Department on December 13, 1897. Just ten days later, Postmaster-General James A. Gary notified Rosewater that an issue of five values (1¢, 2¢, 5¢, 10¢ and $1) would be issued.

When this decision was announced, the stamp collecting community—still smarting from the 1893 Columbian set, with its 16 stamps and face values up to $5, protested in vain. In the ensuing days, as subjects were considered, the set not only was not reduced in size, but was *increased* to nine stamps, with a $2 denomination among the added stamps!

PMG Gary's perspective was very different from that of collectors. In an interview, he stated "I found I had the

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